

ORPHAN RACHEL;
OR,
THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE



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ORPHAN RACHEL.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom ; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. Prov. ix. 10.

RACHEL MAITLAND was sitting beside her blind grandfather, knitting warm woollen stockings for his use against the ensuing winter ; a book lay open before her, from which she was endeavoring to learn the French language without the assistance of a master.

Now some of my readers may feel some doubt respecting the possibility of this double employment ; but knitting forms one of the easiest amusements of the blind, consequently those who enjoy the blessing of sight can knit and read at the same time with the greatest facility, if they possess any skill in that useful art.

Still Rachel was pursuing a dry study of her own accord, which too many learn only as a task ; but then she possessed an inquiring mind, and the poverty of her grandfather denied her the advantages of a liberal education. Thus, with an ardent desire to obtain information, she was left entirely to her own resources for its acquirement.

The recent death of her good and pious grandmother, had engaged Rachel, at the early age of fifteen, in those active duties which the mistress of a family is always called upon to perform. The

time she had hitherto spent in endeavoring to acquire knowledge, was now devoted to the comforts of her aged grandfather ; for Rachel had been early taught to make a difference between what was right, and what only appeared to be so, from the inclination she felt to pursue it. She knew that there was no absolute necessity for her becoming an accomplished woman, while an actual reason existed for her becoming a useful one.

This afternoon, however, she did not feel so contented and happy as usual. Was it that the sun was flinging his bright beams through the window, and that she pined to share the pure bracing air of a September afternoon with some companions of her own age? No ! for the same gay sunbeams glittered upon the silver hair of her grandfather, who was sleeping in his easy chair, and whose afternoon slumbers she was accustomed to watch. His infirmities had doubly endeared him to Rachel, and she loved him too well even to wish to leave him.

What then could occasion the discontent now visibly painted on the expressive countenance of the orphan ? The fact was, that she experienced some new difficulty in learning the French language, and she wanted some one to explain the meaning of the words that puzzled her.

At this moment she dropped her knitting, and leaning her aching head on her hands, pushing the book from her, half determined to give up the attempt altogether. This state of mind was followed

by discontent and repining, and she began to contrast her situation and all its disadvantages with the opportunities for instruction enjoyed by many others.

Rachel's conscience, however, soon reproached her for her ingratitude to Him who had provided her with food and raiment, and who had given her a book of instruction, whose knowledge was able to make her wise unto salvation; and she felt that the learning to be acquired there would endure "when tongues should fail," and all other things should be forgotten.

She wept while she thought of her forgetfulness of these mercies, and taking down the Bible, resolved to compose her mind with reading a chapter before she continued her work.

It happened that she opened at these words: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding:" and this sentence seemed to answer and reprove her repinings, and to carry conviction and consolation to her heart.

Rachel then resumed her employment, and soon overcame the difficulty that perplexed her so much; indeed the time we often spend in vain lamentation when any little trouble befalls us, would generally set every thing right again if we applied it properly.

Rachel's grandfather had spent a great part of his life on the sea, and after he had gained a moderate fortune had retired to his native place, and married an amiable woman, with whom he

hoped to have spent the rest of his days in peace. By this lady Mr. Maitland had a son, whom he regarded with an affection that rendered him completely blind to his faults.

Yet Michael Maitland was of a temper that required to be controlled; his uncorrected faults, as he grew older, strengthened into crimes, and his unhappy father soon found that the ill habits his son had acquired in childhood were not easily to be overcome.

Michael gave way to the most thoughtless extravagance, and spent his days in idleness and his nights in riot and intemperance.

How often did Mr. Maitland regret that he had forbidden his more judicious partner to correct Michael for trifling errors when a child; alas! those seeming trifles (he then saw) were only the seeds of crimes. These self-upbraidings came too late, for Michael's extravagant courses led him to commit a breach of trust, and he was exiled from his country for a term of seven years.

"Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son; but he that is a companion of riotous men, shameth his father." Poor Mr. Maitland often thought of this proverb of Solomon, and wished that he had trained up his child in the right way—that child whose evil courses had brought him to such disgrace.

The unhappy parents changed their place of abode, and retired to a small cottage in an obscure village far from their native county, where they

lived on the small wreck of property that Michael's extravagance had left them.

Time passed on, and religion gradually brought peace to the hearts of the afflicted couple. The term of Michael's banishment was ended, yet no tidings reached them from that distant land whither he had been exiled, and they concluded that he had perished there.

One bitter snowy day, in the beginning of January, a miserable looking man, dressed like a sailor, approached Mr. Maitland's cottage, leading in his hand a little girl, who was crying bitterly with the cold; and knocking at the door, humbly solicited Mrs. Maitland's charity with a downcast look that showed he had not always been accustomed to beg.

The voice was familiar to Mrs. Maitland's ear; she gazed earnestly on that emaciated form, on those pallid features. The eye of the mother pierced through all the changes that time, absence, disease and misery had made in her son's appearance, and in a tone of anguish she pronounced his name. With a convulsive start the mendicant raised his drooping head; he immediately recognised his parent, and clasped her to his bosom in an agony of tenderness and grief.

His wife's sobs brought out Mr. Maitland, who contemplated the affecting scene with mingled feelings of sorrow and surprise. The guilty son turned toward his father, and addressed him in the words of the prodigal in the gospel, "Father, I have sin-

ned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

At those affecting words the heart of the parent melted, "and he fell on his son's neck, and kissed him," and led him and his famished little one to the fire-side, and welcomed them with the greatest affection.

Michael's story was soon told, for he passed over the sufferings he had undergone as a convict, and only spoke of his deep repentance and consequent reconciliation with his offended God. "He had married the virtuous daughter of a Scotch settler," he said, "but death had taken his Ann, and all the pledges of her love, excepting little Rachel; but that heavy affliction had been the means of leading him to feel the need of a Redeemer. His heart yearned for home, and he sold all his effects and embarked for Europe, taking with him the child for whose sake alone he wished to live: but he had suffered shipwreck, and lost every thing but her; and he was begging his way to his native place, when Providence directed him to his parents, whom he imagined to be still farther distant."

The kind Maitlands forgot all the sorrow their son had formerly caused them, in joy for his unexpected return; but Michael did not long survive this happy meeting, for the first spring flowers were scattered on the wanderer's grave, and he slept in peace.

Little Rachel was only three years old at the time of her father's death, and was extremely deli-

cate in her constitution ; but under the judicious management of her grandmother, she soon grew healthy and beautiful. Perhaps in any other family the little orphan might have been injured by too much indulgence ; but Mrs. Maitland had suffered too much from that error in the after-conduct of her son, to fall into it again in the education of her granddaughter. She also knew that she had a serious duty to perform toward God, in training up the child for heaven.

Rachel was controlled in every whim, and was never permitted to be wayward or unruly in her temper ; she was taught to love and fear God from her tenderest infancy, and her little hands were early rendered useful. Thus "trained up in the way she should go," Rachel became the joy and comfort of her venerable friends' declining years, and they beheld her increase in goodness and industry as she increased in age, with feelings of purest delight.

The blindness of her grandfather, and the sudden death of her excellent grandmother, were the first sorrows Rachel had ever known, and they were severe ones ; yet she met them with surprising fortitude, for her grandmother had told her of the sufferings of CHRIST, and taught her to bear all sorrows with fortitude, and thus had fitted her to meet trials with firmness, and resignation to the Divine will.

Rachel, as I have said, possessed an inquiring mind, and this had led her to attempt learning French, as she wished to read some books that had

belonged to her father, and which were in that language; besides, she had a wish to become an instructress, for she knew that her grandfather could leave her nothing, and she was very desirous of being able to gain a respectable livelihood when death should have removed her venerable relative.

God never deserts those who put their trust in him, and he raised up a friend to the orphan in the time of need.

The mild air of Devonshire is generally considered very beneficial to invalids, and the physician employed by a lady of high rank, had recommended her to take her daughter, Lady Elizabeth, into the west of England for the benefit of her health, and she brought her to the beautiful and retired village where Rachel dwelt, in the hope that quietness and good nursing might restore her child again to health. The fond hopes of the parent were all centred in this only and beloved daughter, whose virtues and early piety in the tender morning of her youth gave a bright promise for maturer years, if God should please to extend their number.

Lady Elizabeth's whole life had been spent in the love and fear of God; yet humility is meek, and the wise heiress had not trusted in her own strength, and had followed that divine Saviour through whom alone the fallen children of Adam can be restored to what they ought to be. Now the Christian's warfare was almost ended. the

Christian's race was nearly run: she passed her time in reading God's Word, in prayer for greater and greater sanctification by the SPIRIT, and in works of charity and love, and even here was to be found a preceptress of the ignorant, and a comforter of the poor.

Rachel had been accustomed from her childhood to assist her fellow-creatures, and though her means were small, her grandmother had taught her that even kind words were valuable to the afflicted; and that if she had no money to give, she could impart the knowledge of the Word of God to those who could not read it for themselves. The orphan never left her grandfather for the sake of pleasure, but sometimes she stole a few minutes to devote to the sick, whose sufferings she strove to alleviate by directing their thoughts to the only true source of consolation.

During one of these compassionate visits, Rachel met Lady Elizabeth; and if the orphan were struck with the elegant manners of the high-born heiress, that amiable young lady was equally charmed with the candor and good sense that marked the meek and lowly Rachel; and with the permission of her mother, she formed an intimate acquaintance with her.

Rachel had never had a companion of her own age before, and she returned Lady Elizabeth's regard with the warmest affection.

The young lady found her humble friend engaged one afternoon in knitting and learning

French, according to her usual custom ; and praising her industry and perseverance, declared her readiness to become her preceptress, and from that time used to devote two hours daily to Rachel's instruction. The docile pupil rapidly improved under her friend's tuition, and the fair path of knowledge gradually opened on her view. She related to Lady Elizabeth the perplexity of mind she had formerly endured, and from what source she had obtained relief from the trouble that beset her at that time. Lady Elizabeth was much pleased with the anecdote. "Oh, dear Rachel," said she, "I can, indeed, bear witness to the truth of those words that so sweetly counselled you, for what knowledge but His can sustain me in the time of sickness and decay ? what wisdom but His can give me light at that hour when my dim eyes shall close upon all earthly objects ?"

Rachel looked at her friend, and the conviction rushed on her mind that the lips that uttered those words would soon indeed be mute ; for she had heard the experienced village matrons say, that the blush of consumption was more bright than the hues of health : and the orphan watched her young preceptress with the most painful interest, and every day beheld her fragile form become more thin, and her slender hand more white and slender still, with a grief she could scarcely conceal.

The mother saw the change with feelings of agony, which though religion could soften, it did not wholly subdue. She would have lost no time in

the conveying her to Lisbon, only Lady Elizabeth implored her to permit her to remain where she was.

No human power, indeed, could preserve the young lady from the stroke of death; but as she had a lively faith in CHRIST, and a bright hope of being with him in glory, with a firmness and a hope full of immortality, she meekly bowed herself to meet the coming blow.

How happy would poor Rachel have felt it, could she have attended on her sick friend during her illness; she would have experienced a holy consolation in watching her sick-bed, and smoothing her restless pillow: but Rachel had other duties to perform, for her aged grandfather declined hourly, and required all her care.

Under all these trials Rachel sought assistance from above; and when her health and patience seemed likely to give way, she used to implore help and strength from Him whose mercy never fails, and he did not forsake her in her affliction and trouble.

The feeble lamp of life at length became extinct, and Rachel closed the eyes of her last relative, and wept over him, although the consciousness of having done her duty by him greatly softened her grief.

Scarcely had Rachel followed the remains of her grandfather to the grave,—scarcely had she time to remember that she was a portionless and friendless orphan, whose future support must depend upon her own exertions,—before she was summoned to witness the closing scene of her devout, amiable and high-born preceptress.

Holy hope and peace cheered that bed of death. The meek child of prosperity, who had withstood the deceits of the world,—who had despised its vain pomps, and had fixed her mind on the true riches,—was about to render up her soul into her Redeemer's hands. Yet the Christian's warfare was not yet over; earthly ties and earthly love and friendship still struggled in that dying heart; Lady Elizabeth looked on her mother, and felt that it was hard to part with that beloved friend. The cold hand of Rachel trembled in her grasp, and she was very dear to her soul; tears rushed into her eyes, but piety and a firm trust in God gained the victory over death.

"Weep not for me, dear Mamma; mine is an early, and through faith in CHRIST, a happy death! Ah! father, rejoice that your Elizabeth is spared the temptations and trials of a sinful world! The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, might have stolen my heart from God: he has called me to him in youth, and taken me away from the evil to come." She then took Rachel's hand and put it in her mother's. "See, my Mother, this is your daughter: and, Rachel, this is your mother; yield her a daughter's love, for you must now take my place in her heart and affections. Now I have made my last bequest, join with me in prayer."

In united prayer the afflicted parent, the attached and grateful friend, and all the attendants of that bed of death joined; and Lady Elizabeth expired

with the holy name of that divine and almighty Saviour on her lips, whose footsteps she had humbly followed during her short earthly sojourn.

The Countess and Rachel mingled their tears together, yet they both felt that it would be criminal even to wish to recall the blessed spirit that had just broken its earthly bonds in sunder.

In the affection of her adopted child, the bereaved mother found much comfort and consolation. Rachel resembled Lady Elizabeth in person, and the Countess now took a melancholy pleasure in instructing her in those things which she had been accustomed to teach her deceased daughter, and in a little time she used to think that it was indeed her own Elizabeth, whose duteous care prevented her every wish. Rachel became, in fact, the perfect counterpart of that fair blossom, and her adopted parent loved her with the same affection as if she had been her own child.

The orphan became a very accomplished woman, and was very advantageously settled in life; but she never forgot to praise Him in prosperity, who had been her support and refuge in her low estate, and early taught her children, "that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

THE END.

